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ABSTRACT

The assessment of younger workers as loyal only to themselves has been made largely on social observations. A study conducted in 1982 to examine the career values of new college graduates surveyed 1,991 seniors from 50 colleges and universities nationwide. A follow-up survey was completed by 913 of the original respondents 18 months after graduation. Both surveys explored career values in eight areas: career planning and the job search, perceived determinants of career success, preferred job attributes, work ethics attitudes, performance appraisal and compensation, tradeoffs, organizational practices, and organizational loyalty. The follow-up survey also collected information on the graduates' job characteristics. The findings suggest that new professionals are willing to work hard, but they expect that hard work to pay off. They appeared confident of their individual abilities and believed that their rewards should be based on performance. New professionals seemed to have a clear idea of what they wanted from their jobs, desiring opportunities to develop and meet their potential, be creative, and increase control over their work lives. While they appeared to view the demands of their jobs as important, they were unwilling to elevate them above other demands (family, health, ethical standards, personal happiness). The high turnover among the respondents early in their careers suggests a willingness to move if things are not right. (NB)

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Changing Career Values

Professional Employees in the 1980s

An Executive Summary Adapted from Research
by Dr. David M. Hopkins

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CHANGING CAREER VALUES

Professional Employees in the 1980s

Executive Summary by Patricia A. Sinnott

Adapted from Research by
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In a 1981 article in Management Review, Michael Freeman described a new type of worker whose ranks he feared were growing: "Today's 'successnik,' loyal only to himself, lacks a corresponding loyalty to his employer and to society's other institutions." A harsh assessment, but hardly an uncommon one. In recent literature on the new employee of the '80s, there are consistent references to a shift in career values--and the tone is often critical.

But is this assessment of younger workers on target? That question is difficult to answer. Up to now, most of the reports seem to rely more on the social observations of their authors than on any empirical research.

To help fill the gap, Dr. David M. Hopkins, associate professor of business and public administration at the University of Denver, began a long-term study in 1982 of the career values of new college graduates. This report summarizes the major findings from a follow-up survey in Dr. Hopkins' analysis of how and why work-related values, attitudes, preferences, and expectations change over the course of a professional's career.

The first study, conducted in spring 1982, surveyed nearly 2,000 seniors from 50 colleges and universities nationwide as they were about to graduate. The schools were representative of institutions on the basis of size, competitiveness, affiliation (i.e. public, private, or church), environment (i.e. urban, suburban, or rural), and geographic region. The results of that study were reported in Career Values of the New Lifestyle Professionals, published in 1984 by the CPC Foundation.

The importance of this follow-up study is that it deals with a subset of respondents from the first study. Of the 1,991 students responding to the first survey, 913 (about 46 percent) participated in the follow-up.

The follow-up survey was mailed in October 1983, about 18 months after the students had graduated. The same questions were asked as in the first survey, except where the wording was changed to reflect the passage of time or actual occurrences. The questions explored the graduates' career values in eight areas: career planning and the job search , perceived determinants of career success, preferred job attributes, work ethic attitudes, performance appraisal and compensation, tradeoffs, organizational practices, and organizational loyalty. In addition, the follow-up survey collected new information on the graduates' job characteristics.

In the 18 months since commencement, the vast majority of graduates had become full-time wage earners. Did their career values change significantly in the transition from students to employees? In general, the overall results suggest very little shift in attitudes and preferences. However, closer inspection reveals a good many individual changes that tend to offset each other--as well as some surprising results that give a clearer picture of the new lifestyle professional.

CAREER PLANNING AND THE JOB SEARCH

Dr. Hopkins' comparison of the two surveys showed that about three-quarters of the students accurately predicted what they would be doing after graduation. Nearly half of them were employed by private-sector corporations, almost the same number who said they would be. More than 90 percent did not expect to be self-employed or in the military service, and in fact, they were not. Twelve percent of all graduates were working for the government--only 3 percent fewer than planned to be. And 18 percent found jobs in the nonprofit sector, compared with 24 percent who set this goal as students.

However, Dr. Hopkins did notice two significant discrepancies between the graduates' career plans and practices. First, only about 40 percent of those who planned to enter graduate or professional school were actually attending (although nearly a quarter of all respondents were pursuing this activity). Second, a striking 18 percent changed their minds about taking some time off before beginning their careers. Only 3 percent actually did this.

A look at different subgroups of graduates reveals other noteworthy points. For one thing, a disproportionate number of women were working in the public and nonprofit sectors, a reality that was not reflected in their career plans. Women were also less likely than men to be self-employed, attending graduate school, and in the military service.

Students from private schools and with better grades enrolled in graduate or professional school at a higher rate than their counterparts, while those with lower G.P.A.s were more likely to be working in the private sector.

The major surprise was that graduates employed in the public sector reported higher levels of job satisfaction, greater amounts of overnight job-related travel, more frequent performance appraisals, and a higher perceived chance of losing their jobs than graduates in the private and nonprofit sectors.

Self-employed graduates tended to earn the highest salaries, although they also worked the most hours. Those in the military expressed the greatest job dissatisfaction.

To find their first jobs after graduation, the students favored three strategies: direct contact with employers, the college placement office, and friends and relatives. Eighteen months later, this changed significantly--but not surprisingly--in one area: Thirty-six percent of those who used the college placement office to find jobs would no longer employ this strategy.

What is remarkable is that nearly half the graduates in the follow-up survey said they would still rely on the placement office. Humanities majors were most likely, and business and preprofessional majors least likely, to use the placement office after graduation.

Advertised job openings gained the most adherents. In fact, it was this strategy that bumped the college placement office off the top-three chart. More than a quarter of the respondents did not use this strategy before graduation, but said they would 18 months later.

Graduates continued to shy away from using public and private employment agencies, with more than 60 percent reporting that they did not, and would not, use this approach to finding a job. However, use of public agencies seemed to increase with age, while use of private agencies appeared to increase with salary.

PERCEIVED DETERMINANTS OF CAREER SUCCESS

In both surveys, Dr. Hopkins asked the respondents to rank nine factors in determining career success. Eighteen months after graduation, these new professionals had realigned their thinking on this matter in one major and unexpected way: They came to view work experience as significantly more important to career success and the ability to work with people as less crucial.

Sixty-four percent of the graduates said work experience was one of the top three factors in career success--an 11 percent increase over the first survey. By contrast, 14 percent fewer grads--a total of 54 percent--ranked the ability to work with people in the top three. The third critical factor was job performance, cited by 62 percent.

The least important factors in the follow-up survey were willingness to take risks (7 percent), ability to play office politics (9 percent), and organizational commitment (13 percent). Formal education, training/technical knowledge, and "other" factors (e.g. luck) fell in the middle.

Gender and academic major accounted for the most significant differences among subgroups in the follow-up survey. Women placed more importance than men on formal education and work experience, while men stressed willingness to take risks and ability to work with people more than women did. Business and public administration majors put greater emphasis on organizational commitment than did other majors; math/physical science and preprofessional majors viewed training and technical knowledge as critical.

Other significant results from the subgroups include the following:

- Better students put less emphasis on work experience.
- Graduates earning higher salaries--$26,000 to $49,000--attributed much less importance to formal education.
- New employees who were very satisfied with their jobs emphasized formal education, while those who were fairly dissatisfied stressed the ability to play office politics.

- Graduates who worked longer hours believed risk-taking was important.

- Those who reported a moderate probability of losing their jobs downplayed organizational commitment, while those who reported a high probability of losing their jobs considered this factor crucial.

Overall, Dr. Hopkins' findings suggest that new professionals have a fairly conservative attitude toward career success. They expect experience and hard work to pay off, while they view a willingness to take risks in their jobs as unnecessary.

PREFERRED JOB ATTRIBUTES

In his book The Human Use of Human Resources, Marvin Karlins states, "If you want worker productivity, you must satisfy worker needs." What are the needs of today's new professionals? What motivates them on the job? The answers are critical--to improving productivity, to controlling absenteeism, and most importantly, to reducing costly turnover among new professionals. Today, the average corporation loses 50 percent of its college recruits within five years. That's a 40 percent increase since 1960, reports the Sterling Institute, a Washington, D.C., management consulting firm.

In both studies, Dr. Hopkins asked the respondents to rank 20 job attributes. The attributes were culled from the literature to represent the five dimensions of Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs":

1. Physiological needs--convenient work location, adequate salary, comfortable working conditions, free organization-provided meals.

2. Safety/security needs--good insurance benefits, substantial job security, noncompetitive atmosphere, clearly defined assignments.

3. Social needs--coworkers with similar beliefs, substantial interaction among employees, friendly coworkers, organization-sponsored social activities.

4. Esteem needs--high salary, importance in the eyes of others, recognition for good performance, influence over others.

5. Self-actualization needs--freedom for self-expression and creativity, opportunity to use skills and abilities, interest and self-satisfaction, opportunity for personal development.

Overall, the graduates' preferences in a job changed little since leaving college. In the follow-up survey, the most preferred of the 20 job attributes was interest and self-satisfaction, followed by the opportunity to use skills and abilities, recognition for good performance, and the opportunity for personal development. This was the same as in the initial survey, except #3 and #4 were reversed.

Compensation, and perhaps the security it provides, did seem to gain some importance since the first survey. This trend was true for both direct compensation, or salary and wages, and indirect compensation, or fringe benefits. On the other hand, the graduates' preference for freedom of self-expression and creativity, comfortable working conditions, and a noncompetitive atmosphere dropped slightly.

In terms of broad needs, the graduates still placed the highest value on self-actualization. Far behind were esteem and security needs, with physiological and social needs bringing up the rear.

In the follow-up, Dr. Hopkins also asked the graduates which of the same 20 attributes were being met in their current jobs. The biggest surprise: Those grads whose jobs currently provided the attributes they preferred were the respondents who most strongly preferred those particular attributes. All motivation theories assume that most people's desire for something decreases as that desire is satisfied. In this case, the opposite appears to be true: Having jobs that provided certain attributes did not reduce the graduates' preference for those attributes.

Finally, the subgroups differed most by institutional competitiveness. Graduates from the more competitive schools were concerned more about social and esteem needs, and less about security, than those from the less competitive schools. Likewise, men worried less about security than women did.

An interesting point is that graduates with high G.P.A.s, more so than poorer students, tended to shun a competitive work atmosphere. Also noteworthy, those in the higher salary ranges had a greater preference for clearly defined assignments.

WORK ETHIC ATTITUDES

"Hard work always pays off." That's what 58 percent of the work force believed in 1960, according to a survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White. In his study, Dr. Hopkins measured the work ethic of new professionals by their willingness to work hard and to do what was asked of them in their jobs.

In the initial survey, the respondents demonstrated a fairly solid work ethic. Thirty percent reported that they would work long hours (more than 50 a week), and only 11 percent said they would limit themselves to the traditional 40 hours or less. Eighteen months later, their work ethic had become slightly stronger. Nearly a third of the graduates now said they were willing to work more than 50 hours a week, while 9 percent said 40 hours would be the maximum. As in the first survey, about 60 percent were willing to work 41 to 50 hours a week.

The picture is somewhat different looked at from another angle. Since the first survey, the graduates became a little less willing to be away from home overnight because of their jobs. However, less than 10 percent were unwilling to travel overnight and almost 30 percent were willing to be away six nights or more a month, indicating that the graduates' work ethic is still quite strong.

Even more so than as students, the graduates agreed that raises should be based on individual performance. An overwhelming 84 percent believed this--up 5 percent from the first survey. Again, this suggests a strong work ethic.

Similarly, the most preferred form for additional rewards was still salary. Reduced workload and more time off remained the least favored.

Men seemed to have a stronger work ethic than women, as measured by their greater willingness to work long hours and travel overnight. They also showed more confidence in themselves, putting more emphasis on performance-based raises. The latter was also true for business and public administration grads compared with other academic majors.

The most surprising finding was that graduates who were older, better students, earning the highest salaries, and least concerned about losing their jobs seemed to have a weaker work ethic than their counterparts did.

Finally, graduates currently working the longest hours and traveling the most were also the most willing to do those two things.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND COMPENSATION

Eighty percent of the graduates in the follow-up wanted more than one formal performance appraisal a year. Most favored two a year (47 percent), while some preferred one a quarter (27 percent). Few wanted an evaluation every month (6 percent).

The major shift between surveys was from evaluation once a quarter to twice a year. Apparently, the need for formal feedback decreases with experience.

In another question on preferred additional rewards, 68 percent of the graduates opted for additional salary. Eighteen months earlier, only 52 percent chose this form of reward, ranking it equally with the freedom to structure their own work schedules. The preference for more fringe benefits also grew, although only slightly.

Dental insurance became the most popular fringe benefit, ranked in the top three by 69 percent of the graduates. However, a retirement plan and four weeks of paid vacation remained very important. They were placed in the top three by 68 percent and 58 percent of the graduates, respectively. Tuition reimbursement also gained popularity since the first survey.

In the follow-up, significantly fewer graduates valued subsidized housing. The grads also continued to see little need for company-subsidized day care and meals.

As with preferred job attributes, graduates receiving certain fringe benefits in their current jobs also expressed a higher preference for those fringes. Likewise, the number of formal appraisals in their jobs directly correlated with the number

the number of formal appraisals in their jobs directly correlated with the number they wanted. Again, this supports the conclusion that people choose jobs that offer what they profess to desire.

Among subgroups, older graduates (aged 30 or more) preferred fewer performance appraisals. The same was true of grads earning higher salaries.

While raises based on individual performance was the overwhelming choice of both sexes, women were nearly twice as likely as men to prefer cost-of-living raises, and about four times as likely to favor seniority increases. Business and public administration majors also believed more strongly in performance-based raises than did any other major.

Graduates earning high salaries, traveling a lot, and supervising people showed more interest in profit-sharing as an additional reward. Apparently, people with greater responsibility are more likely to want to link their rewards with the success of the organization.

As for fringes, women had a stronger preference than men for dental insurance, tuition reimbursement, and day-care facilities, while men leaned more toward a company car and subsidized housing.

TRADEOFFS

People have many demands on their time and attention, and naturally, these demands occasionally come into conflict. Dr. Hopkins asked the graduates to position the demands of religion, family, and personal time against those of their careers.

After 18 months in the "real world," most graduates still considered family, health, ethics, and happiness more important than job demands. However, this finding masks some rather radical changes since graduation. For example, family considerations became more important than job demands for 22 percent of the grads. This was exactly offset by another 22 percent for whom family became less important. So the seeming lack of change is in fact a 44 percent change. For most other factors, this "hidden" shift was even greater.

Between surveys, both free time and vacation time grew in importance, while concern about community contribution and personal health shrank.

As they matured, the graduates also required a larger raise in order to relocate for a new job--all other aspects of the two jobs being equal. Half wanted an 11 percent to 25 percent pay hike; another 30 percent wanted a raise of 26 percent to 50 percent. Nine percent said no salary increase would entice them to move.

The growing number of dual-career families has created yet another conflict in today's work world. Dr. Hopkins also explored this subject.

Overall, support for this type of arrangement increased. Seventy percent of the graduates said both husband and wife should pursue full-time careers if they wanted--up 6 percent from the first survey. However, traces of role stereotyping remained. In both surveys, 12 percent felt that the wife should stay home and raise the children, while not one person said the husband should. Men, and married graduates in general, were more likely to say the wife should stay home and raise the children.

Support for dual careers was evident in another area as well. Ninety percent of the graduates said they would move immediately to accommodate a spouse's promotion or as soon as they could find a job in the new location. The biggest change between surveys was that 4 percent more said they would relocate immediately rather than wait. Commuting marriages, where the spouses work in different locations and see each other on weekends, were still very unpopular, preferred by only 2 percent in both surveys.

Personal happiness was more important to those dissatisfied with their current jobs. This group also valued free time more, as did younger people and those working 35 to 59 hours a week.

In relation to these tradeoffs, job demands fell in the middle for most grads. Nonwork time appears to be fairly important to new professionals.

VALUES REGARDING ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

The general public increasingly expects large public and private institutions to behave as responsible and moral citizens. Because the future leaders of these institutions will largely come from the ranks of today's college graduates, it is important to understand the value orientations of this group--their perceptions of right and wrong. What ethical norms and conscience will new professionals bring to their positions of responsibility?

Dr. Hopkins set out 10 practices for the respondents to review. As they moved from students to employees, their views on these practices changed little. The four most objectionable were the same in the follow-up as in the initial survey:

- Selling a product that scientific evidence indicates is harmful to consumers.
- Paying women and/or minorities less than white males for comparable performance in comparable jobs.
- Paying foreign government officials in order to do business in their countries.
- Requiring a lie detector test as a condition of employment.

It's noteworthy that the top three of these are also the most likely to result in legal recourse. However, the graduates showed a reluctance to take external action, perhaps believing that taking such action would brand them as traitors. Instead, they preferred to fight the practice internally or simply to refuse to work at the company.

The three least objectionable practices were also the same in both surveys:

- Dating an immediate supervisor.
- Attempting to get government restrictions on competing foreign products.
- Using lie detector tests to detect theft within the organization.

Falling in the middle again were:

- Using company time or resources for outside business ventures.
- Hiding expenses for your spouse on an expense report.
- Attempting to prevent unionization.

While the respondents' attitudes toward these practices remained remarkably stable over time, the most dramatic shift between surveys was the decreased objection to attempts by company officials to prevent unionization. This response may not represent an anti-union attitude but rather, given the traditional adversarial nature of labor-management relations, a realization that blocking unionization is perceived by managers as a responsibility of company officials.

The graduates also became less opposed to hiding a spouse's expenses in an expense report and to using company time or resources for personal ventures.

Disapproval grew the most for dating a supervisor, using a lie detector to detect theft, and selling harmful products.

Gender once again accounted for the most noticeable differences among subgroups. Women were more opposed than men to four practices: paying women/minorities less, preventing unionization, paying government officials for business, and selling harmful products.

Age also affected views on two practices. Older graduates were significantly more opposed to selling harmful products, but less opposed to paying women/minorities less.

ORGANIZATIONAL LOYALTY

In the final part of his survey, Dr. Hopkins asked the graduates how long they planned to work for their current employers. His expectation was that in the 18 months since graduation, their organizational loyalty would have grown--that is, they would expect to stay longer with their employers than they had planned to as students. But what Dr. Hopkins found was quite surprisingly the opposite.

Rather than increasing, the graduates' expected tenure with their employers declined rather dramatically between surveys. As students, only sixteen percent of them planned to stay with their first employers less than two years; 18 months later, this figure more than doubled to 35 percent.

However, a closer look at the findings partially explains this dramatic shift. For example, students in the initial survey who expected to stay with their first employers for three years would answer two to five years. Eighteen months later, if their expectations were the same, they would now respond less than two years. In fact, it appears that the major shift was between these two responses. Also, fewer respondents in the follow-up said they had no clear expectation about their job tenure.

It is more interesting that less than two years out of college, only 13 percent of the graduates planned to be with their current employers more than five years. In the initial survey, 14 percent said they would work for their first employers five years or longer.

Furthermore, in the first survey 67 percent expected to have two or three employers in the first five years after graduation; only a year and a half later, 41 percent had already had that many employers.

The follow-up did show that 87 percent of the graduates worked for only one or two employers since graduation, connoting a fair degree of stability. Nevertheless, nearly half of them changed employers in the 18 months between surveys, which suggests that new professionals are more dynamic than stable in their employment.

Among subgroups, women and unmarried graduates expected shorter tenure with their employers than did men and married grads. The same was true of those in the lowest and highest salary ranges.

On a positive note, the more hours the graduates worked, the longer they planned to stay with their current employers. In contrast, the more dissatisfied they were with their jobs, the sooner they expected to leave those jobs.

THE OVERALL PICTURE

Taking Dr. Hopkins' results as a whole, they describe a group of new professionals who are willing to work hard and pay their dues--and they expect hard work, good performance, and increased work experience to pay off. They are confident of their individual abilities, and they believe their rewards should be based on that performance.

New professionals also have a clear idea of what they want from their jobs. Unquestionably, they desire jobs that allow them to develop further and meet their fullest potential. They desire a chance to be creative and to increase control over their work lives. Furthermore, they will deliberately seek out jobs that give them what they want--the attributes, fringe benefits, hours, and travel requirements they most strongly prefer.

But while new professionals view the demands of their jobs as important, they are unwilling to elevate them above all other demands on their time and attention, particularly family, health, ethical standards, and personal happiness. They clearly value their nonwork time.

The high turnover among this survey group early in their careers also indicates that new professionals are willing to pick up and move on if things are not right. Undoubtedly, in some situations, the relationship is severed by the employer, but in either case, such turnover results in a high cost to both employers and employees, although perhaps some benefits accrue to both as well.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Having current information on the career values of the new employee of the '80s is crucial to employers, to the people who prepare individuals for the job market, and to society in general. Only with this information can we be sure that employment is designed to meet the changing needs of today's young professionals who will be tomorrow's leaders.

Indeed, what Dr. Hopkins found was that some values have already changed. While in many respects new professionals still take a traditional approach to work, their level of organizational loyalty is low. They expect their employers to accommodate their need for self-fulfillment. They refuse to place the job before all other commitments. And they are not afraid to find out if the grass is greener elsewhere.

What does all of this mean for career planning, placement, and recruitment practitioners? Dr. Hopkins took that last logical step and offers the following practical suggestions:

Organizational Representatives: First, if you are an employer, a supervisor, or a recruiter, you should educate yourself on an ongoing basis about what your

employees want from their jobs. You cannot offer what people want if you don't know what that is.

Second, seek to do a better job of clarifying the organizational culture: What are your organizational values? How do things get done? How formal are organizational relationships? What are the operative organizational goals and objectives, aside from the official ones, and what means will and will not be tolerated for reaching those objectives? This clarification allows greater honesty with prospective employees and leads to a better match between organizational and individual goals.

Third, be flexible in your approach to employees. Although the overall statistics often disguised it, the new professionals in this study showed a great deal of diversity in their values, preferences, attitudes, and objectives. To deal with this diversity, employers must adopt flexible programs and policies, such as "cafeteria" benefits plans and alternative work schedules.

Fourth, seek to broaden jobs and career paths. Broader job descriptions, lateral moves, and attempts to train generalists have benefits for both organizations and individuals. The organization benefits from more cross-training and thus better backup in emergencies, as well as from employees who can see the big picture. For individuals, this breadth opens new career paths, satisfies the need for new knowledge and personal development, reduces boredom, and creates understanding, empathy, and the ability to view problems from other perspectives.

Finally, create more open organizations. Develop procedures for actively soliciting the input and suggestions of all employees. Open channels of communication so that complaints can be received and acted upon internally.

College Placement Personnel: College placement offices should first consider expanding services to alumni. While there is an understandable move away from using the placement office after graduation, a large number of graduates in this study said they would still use the office if available. Given the high turnover among new professionals, alumni placement services might be a way for some institutions to attract new students in a tight market.

Second, placement offices must seek to facilitate a better match between graduates and employers. It is not enough simply to serve as a clearinghouse for job seekers and job providers. Find ways to educate students about the diversity of organizations and their cultures as well as the diversity of jobs.

Finally, college placement offices might extend their services more equally across student populations. Traditionally, placement offices have done a better job of matching students with private-sector employers and thus have better served business and public administration majors or other students interested in corporate jobs. Likewise, greater attention must be paid to the special needs of other student groups, such as racial minorities, foreigners, the handicapped, older or mid-career students, and career changers. Placement offices need to broaden their concept of what placement means, the students to be served, the employers that are available, and the types of services provided.

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